

# Iran, the Shah, SAVAK, and Torture (CBS, 1980)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI> (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI>)

Uploaded by [Our Hidden History](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbfzszfxZr4qmeZjZ_3R_Pw) ([https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbfzszfxZr4qmeZjZ\\_3R\\_Pw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbfzszfxZr4qmeZjZ_3R_Pw)) on Tue Feb 23 2021.

1980 episode of CBS '60 Minutes' on #Iran, #SAVAK, and #Torture  
From the collection of Hoh-Kun Yuen: [https://archive.org/details/cueth\\_000300](https://archive.org/details/cueth_000300)  
Ethnic Studies Library, University of California, Berkeley

From Counterpunch Magazine:  
When a US President Tried to Muzzle 60 Minutes About Iran  
BY BARRY LANDO, SEPTEMBER 27, 2013

Paris.

In his address to the UN a few days ago, President Obama came the closest any American leaders has come to acknowledging America's shameful legacy with Iran: overthrowing a democratically- elected government, installing a corrupt, repressive dictatorship in its place. It was something of an apology-almost. In fact more than 30 years ago, during the hostage crisis, another American President, Jimmy Carter attempted to block a 60 Minutes broadcast that also suggested the U.S. owed Iran something of an apology.

At the time, I had already made several reporting trips to Iran for 60 Minutes; had met its young revolutionaries; knew of the past relations between Iran and the U.S.— of the close ties between the Shah's secret police—the Savak—and the CIA. It was not difficult to understand the volatile anti-American emotions that had exploded with the revolution. They were being stoked by Khomeini's more extremist followers. They had organized the taking of 54 American Embassy hostages to undermine the moderates in the new chaotic regime, and advance their own radical cause.

Indeed, the anti-Iranian outrage provoked by the hostage-taking was boiling in the United States. In Washington, I was shocked to see stickers on every door up and down the corridors of the State Department hallways backing "The 54", and a huge billboard on in New York, right up the block from CBS, with the most diabolical image of Khomeini, glowering over 57th street. Americans I spoke with seemed to lack any understanding of the history and emotion driving the Iranians. I suggested we do a crash report on the subject for 60 Minutes. Mike Wallace and our executive producer, Don Hewitt, agreed.

Over the next four days, we stitched together a very strong segment based on a series of interviews in New York and Washington. Former officials from the State Department and the CIA gave vivid first hand accounts of the extremely close cooperation between the U.S. and the regime of the Shah, despite the mounting evidence of torture and corruption under his rule.

Jesse Leaf, for instance, a former CIA analyst, said that early on in the 70's he had wanted to write a report on torture in Iran but was ordered not to. "You'd have to be blind deaf and dumb and a presidential candidate not to know there was torture going on in Iran," Leaf said. "We knew what was happening and we did nothing about it, and I was told not to do anything about it. By definition, an enemy of the Shah was an enemy of the CIA. We were friends. This was a very close relationship between the United States and Iran."

Another former CIA officer, Richard Cottam, also condemned the U.S. for turning a blind eye to the excesses of the Shah, and refusing to deal with minority opposition groups. Such were the policy guidelines, he said,

laid down by Henry Kissinger....

(more: <https://www.counterpunch.org/2013/09/27/when-a-us-president-tried-to-muzzle-60-minutes-about-iran/>)

For more related content, please visit:

<http://ourhiddenhistory.org/>

<https://archive.org/details/@altviewstv-fanclub>

---

[00:00:00 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI)

today is the 120th day the american hostages have been held captive in tehran and today marks the end of the first week of the un tribunal's investigation into the alleged crimes of the deposed shah they have been asked also to investigate iranian charges of u.s complicity in those acts why do so many iranians believe in u.s complicity guilt why do they so fervently endorse the anti-american commany and the holding of the hostages of course we know the embassy takeover was triggered by the shah's entry into the u.s last october for medical treatment more about that later but beyond that the fury in iran focuses on the undenied fact that the cia restored the exile shah to the peacock throne back in 1953 and after that the iranians have been told the cia helped the shah set up sarak the secret police force that has tortured so many thousands of them a classified senate foreign relations committee report confirms the cia's role in forming sarak it says the cia provided the shah money as well as training for that purpose of course the brutality came later in 1976 in the abraham palace in tehran i asked the shah about the continuing reports of torture inflicted by his savak upon so many of his citizens now when an outfit like the international commission of jurists comes here and then comes out with a report saying that in spite of what you say your majesty torture continues how do they know well they can't continue saying this well they talk about psychological and physical torture physical i don't believe i talk not anymore maybe in the old days maybe i talked just today to a man whom i

[00:02:00 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=120s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=120s)

to a man whom i believe who told about torture how many years ago within i want to be very careful not yesterday ah well maybe i don't know the word has gone out to stop it to stop what torture but a long time ago yes how long ago well i won't tell you as you don't tell me this was the man who told me just hours before my interview with the shaw in the fall of 1976 who told me about torture still going on rajisam gavadi then a highly respected iranian journalist who now reports for time magazine i spoke to him in new york a few days ago when you told me back in 1976 october yes that torture physical torture was still going on how did you know it my brother was released from jail perhaps a week after before i saw you there were torture marks all over his body the physical torture went on and the psychological torture was worse than physical torture my own brother a political prisoner was taken once to this dark room and shown the mangled bodies of a few persons and he was told that relatives of his including his brother including his mother and his father were among the corpses and he was instructed to identify them so he spent hours and hours and uh trying to decide whether the stump of a head this smashed pulp of a face belong to his brother to his mother you mean you yes and this was a deliberate lie but he didn't know so through a series of psychological tortures as his majesty said uh they drove him crazy insane and he

[00:04:01 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=241s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=241s)

uh they drove him crazy insane and he came out thousands and thousands of dollars went into his treatment and uh even now i can't say that he is a complete human being rajisam kabati spoke then of an episode that took place on the occasion of president carter's visit to tehran on new year's eve december 1977. we were celebrating the new year's eve with the american press in the hilton hotel and mr carter was given a speech that night saying i don't i don't remember the words exactly but he was saying that america has never had such a good friend america has never been so close with another nation with another leader and it

profoundly touches us that the shah takes care of his people so well and his people love him so well on that very night new year's eve said some gabardi his brother was seized with another fit and he brought him to a mental hospital close to the shah's palace and a doctor there told me that seventy percent of our cases are savated people it is 1978 about two years perhaps 15 months after your talk with the shah and after his claim that torture is not going on max mccarthy three-term democratic congressman now washington bureau chief of the buffalo news was press officer at the american embassy in tehran in 76 he had put me in touch with some kabaddi rajis about his brother did you know the brother i did and he was uh imprisoned tortured and i saw him afterward and the poor guy was just a walking dead man i mean he was a zombie as a result of torture at the hands of sadaq right a trial of two sabacc torturers held in iran after the fall of the shah one of a

[00:06:01 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=361s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=361s)

after the fall of the shah one of a score such trials during which these men and others confess to heinous crimes sticking hot iron bars in noses and eyes hanging prisoners upside down to beat them using everything from thick whips to electric shock raping both male and female prisoners torturing one member of a family in front of the other often victims were then forced to swallow cyanide tablets or taken out and shot some other victims like this young iranian we filmed a few weeks ago in a london hospital were permanently crippled over three years in an iranian prison he was apparently subjected to repeated spinal injections another form of torture he is paralyzed unable to talk doctors say he soon will die is it your understanding that we you in the embassy knew what was going on with savak well i did in fact it was such acts by savak and the indifference of the american diplomatic establishment in iran to such savagery that caused max mccarthy to resign as press officer there in late 1976 and he wrote a report following his resignation in your report you say u.s mission personnel are regularly warned not to divulge to any american correspondent information that iranian government does not want disclosed or which tells too much about the u.s role in iran you serious that's right in other words dick helms as ambassador would say look the u.s role in iran we don't want too much news of that in the american press correct ambassador helms was pro-shaw right well he used to say there's no alternative to the shah which i suppose at that time americans generally believed and so in in being shaw you you did what the show wanted you to do

[00:08:00 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=480s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=480s)

you did what the show wanted you to do in effect right there was a that that was a very prevalent idea giving the shot what he wants remember there were articles to that effect and and why was it so important to give the shah what he wants well because he was our pillar in the persian gulf and we built our whole security on this one man all right therefore if the shock committed excesses we had to forgive that if we knew about corruption that went on right there were more transcendently important considerations than corruption and repression so the united states knew really what was going on but was willing to say well wait a minute for the greater good of the greater number of people let's turn our back on these brutalities excesses corruptions i believe that's a fair statement it was not just in iran in the late 70s that americans knew what was going on jesse leaf was iran analyst for the cia in langley virginia in the early 70s he had heard reports of savak brutalities and he wanted to do something about it in fact at one point i was going to write a report on torture in iran and it was told not to by by on division level this was in what year i it was in i can't give you an exact year i believe it was 70 71 something like that well who was the head of the cia at the time well the house yeah at the thomas was richard helms but um he would have known about well you'd either have to be blind deaf and dominant presidential candidate not to know there was torture going on in iran i mean it was all over the place amnesty international has a huge file on on what happened i i have seen from various i saw from various sources descriptions of torture rooms in salvak headquarters in tehran we knew it was happening and we did nothing about it and i was told not to do anything about it this was an eternal iranian

[00:10:00 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=600s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=600s)

it this was an eternal iranian affair job was to keep the lid on this dissident elements within the population originally it was communist then it meant anybody who said to look crosswise at the shah by definition mike an enemy of the shah was an enemy of the cia they were we were very close we were friend this was a very close relationship between the united states and iran what do you know mr leaf about the cia savak and torch when the agency set up sabacc they had regular instructional classes part of the instructional classes were in interrogation techniques as part of intensive interrogation techniques torture is covered that leaf says was a classroom lecture although one former savak agent still in iran claims the cia actually showed savage agents how to physically torture prisoners guys baloney especially coming from the source i mean he's working for he's working for the other side now uh i mean he's testifying in order to save his own life oh i think i think so we didn't have to we didn't have to teach the iranians torture i mean or to torture people they have a long long growing history in that part of the world of torture so it's an everyday thing so far we've been talking about savak in iran but what about sabat outside iran like our own cia savak also conducted operations abroad here is a vivid example we first told this tale three years ago on sixty minutes it's centered on this man then living in paris jules canpira an adventurer a soldier of fortune born in the soviet union he lived clandestinely in western europe a stateless man in and out of prison several times until finally he was granted an iranian passport and

[00:12:00 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=720s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=720s)

he was granted an iranian passport and went to work as a journalist in tehran then he says he was contacted by savak and sent back to france on a mission of political assassination his first target was to be sadek absalek the man who was now iran's foreign minister but who when we first met him three years ago in paris was a little-known supporter of an iranian religious leader then in exile in iraq the ayatollah khamenei kanfira instead of killing gobsadek told him the whole story and told him also that he had been commissioned by savak to kill another man an american nasser afshar a wealthy businessman formerly an iranian now an american citizen whose home was in alexandria virginia where he published the iran free press a newspaper filled with attacks against the shah his regime and his family why would the savak want to kill you nassar because i'm the publisher of iran free press simplest my dear friend mike i think this is very ridiculous auntish years of haiti today lives in exile in switzerland at the time of our report on salah three years ago he was iran's ambassador to the united states we are not the people who want to kill anyone we had traitors in the past many of them has come back even the communists but when we checked out kanpira's story three years ago it stood up we were satisfied he was telling the truth though every government agency we talked to at the time denied it the state department the cia no one knew anything about it or so they said and there the matter stood until the senate foreign relations committee investigated the activities of foreign intelligence organizations in the united states including we have secured a portion of that classified report from dale vanetta of jack anderson staff

[00:14:01 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=841s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=841s)

jack anderson staff and it confirms kanpira's story in every detail it says the cia had known of the afshar assassination plot for more than a year prior to our broadcast that the bureau of intelligence and research of the state department had been told about it by the c i a and that the u s embassy in iran had also indicated that one jules confira had been trained in assassination techniques though kanpira never operated in the of united st did how did we learn that from the shah of iran himself when i spoke to him in 1976 and they are there for the purpose of checking up on iranian students checking up on anybody who becomes affiliated with circles organizations hostile to my country which is the role of any intelligence organization and they are there with the knowledge and consent of the united states government i think it is that statement caused a flap henry kissinger categorically denied u.s knowledge of sovak activity here but he promised to make inquiries two weeks later his aide robert fonseth announced that after an investigation the state department had quote found no evidence of any illegal or improper activity well that was totally misleading as the senate report makes clear the report confirms that savak's primary function in the united states was to spy on iranian dissidents like these students who could be targets for savak upon their return to iran and the report says

also that the cia itself furnished savak with information gathered by the fbi training of savage personnel continued in the us and the cia did not ask that savak refrained from using in the united states the surveillance techniques it learned here and during the court of years savak activity continued here

[00:16:01 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=961s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=961s)

activity continued here in july of seventy eight according to the washington post then deputy attorney general civiletti warns a big nief brzezinski that sabach was involved in significant police security and non-diplomatic activity in the us but there is no indication the post said that brzezinski made any move to tighten control over savak's actions why the reluctance of the united states to crack down on savak or even to send its agents home three years ago ambassadors of haiti answered my question about that quite candidly and if the us government tells iran to pull its agents out of this country if united states government does not want it we are not going to insist and we shall ask them to leave at the same time we shall ask your people to leave my country that threat coming from the shah himself was repeated many times to us officials in documents we have seen the united states was not willing to pay that price iran was a vital listening post for the cia with a thousand miles and more of border with the soviet union former cia officer now political science professor richard cotton explains the fact of the show allowed are watching operations from iran monitoring operations terribly important to us but i'd say more generally that wherever you have this kind of liaison relationship with another service like savak that the hold they have over you is very substantial our support for iran meant turning a blind eye to the excesses of the shah and according to khan it meant failing to recognize the mounting opposition to the shah inside iran and he holds henry kissinger responsible he coined the phrase total commitment why look at a minor group of opposition people and gratuitously annoy the shah when the operations that we do jointly are so important to both countries

[00:18:00 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=1080s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=1080s)

are so important to both countries what you seem to be saying professor cotton is that when the question who lost iran is finally asked henry kissinger's that is at the top of your culprits list i think henry kissinger's idea of diplomacy in this sense is intolerable i believe that you should never be in a position of not reading the full breadth of public opinion in any country and kissinger to cut us off entirely from from a major popular force i think is to a very extensive extent responsible for a lot of what's happened yes two events in 1978 infuriated and unified the legions who oppose the shah the january massacre in the holy city of gom by savak and the iranian police and then as the opposition to the shah solidified the tragic fire in the rex theater in abaddon in august hundreds died in that fire allegedly set by savak either to capture or kill several key agents of the khamenei revolution known to be inside a man charged with some responsibility for those two episodes was razer razmi said by the present iranian embassy in washington to be a savak agent he was police chief in com in january and in abu dhabi in august do you know the name yes who used to be the police chief of the city of rome he committed great atrocities there had people shot on the streets and he was taken to abaddon and promoted to a general's rank because he had performed gallant duty and um in abu dhabi during his tenure that as the police chief of the city

[00:20:00 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=1200s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=1200s)

the police chief of the city uh the rex cinema fire a very controversial fire broke out in which about 600 people 500 people i don't exactly remember a huge number uh died were incinerated incinerated policemen actually prevented the people from breaking a hole into the wall or somehow breaking the walls down or the doors down and getting the people out today that former chief of police reza rasmi lives under an alias in fresno california we found him there and tried to talk to him but he refused we learned he had entered the united states in january of seventy nine the iranians have protested to the state department what they call rasmus asylum here they say they want him back in tehran for trial and the state department acknowledges that an informal protest was lodged with secretary vance last october by iran's then foreign minister ibrahim yazdi and that vance promised to look into the matter but said he would need evidence on which to proceed both sides agree the iranians have yet to produce that evidence the cia refused us any comment whatsoever on

rasmi but the fbi told us they had learned the date of his entry into the port of new york and after he settled in california they said razzmi called the cia for protection the fbi said the cia had referred him to them and the fbi office in san francisco referred him to the local police so the rasmi mystery remains and he remains in fresno we should make it clear that no one we have spoken to iranian or american has suggested there was any collusion between american authorities and the shah's officials to arrange for rasmus entry into the united states in january of seventy nine joseph cisco is today chancellor of american university in washington but for 25 years he was in the state department his last chore is

[00:22:00 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=1320s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=1320s)

the state department his last chore is under secretary to henry kissinger and though he acknowledges the excesses that took place in iran he says there is another side to the story the accomplishments of the shah that too many people are right now unwilling to credit what i'm trying to suggest to you is in the present emotional environment take in iran do you think that they're either the commission or the people in iran the leadership in iran are able today to look at this in the context of 25 years of iranian-american relationships the very fact that the iranian u.s relationship provided a certain umbrella for iran to permit the country to develop economically to permit education to be broadened to permit land reform to permit a new industrial uh class in other words for there to be 20 or 25 years of progress towards uh bringing iran to a modern state if that is true i ask cisco why did the iranians overthrow the shah why do they apparently hate him so number of reasons uh one no real opportunity for political expression uh secondly uh a certain amount of repression third there's no question uh mike that uh in and around the throne uh corruption uh had developed i don't say there weren't grievances i think it's important however as we look at this to look at both the positive and the negative elements understood and we share a measure of responsibility i don't i don't uh either condone how much of a measure of responsibility do you think that we bear very difficult because what has developed is the myth of american control in relationship to iran or

[00:24:01 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=1441s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=1441s)

in relationship to iran or for that matter to third world countries let me read to you from a senate foreign relations committee report with which i'm sure you're familiar in the 1970s three or four cia officials met weekly with their savak counterparts to discuss common interests this was at a time when it was well known that savak agents in the united states according to this same once secret senate report said significant police security and non-diplomatic political activity is carried out by savak in the united states including quote the planned assassination of a u.s citizen by a man who told the cia he had been tasked by savak to kill a u.s citizen just one example well you can't possibly condone anything like that and i don't think i don't know of anyone who does just today we're doing this interview on monday february 25th right just today mr cisco iran's president banisade said that he's amazed at the naivete of the united states of u.s officials and said that america still fails to understand the revolution that overthrew the shah to break tehran's american hostage stalemate says president the united states could clear the unfavorable climate in relations between the two nations by conceding to iran three demands this according to president assad they are admission of u.s past wrongs a pledge not to interfere in our internal affairs and future and agreeing not to block our efforts to get back the shah and the wealth of iran he embezzled are those demands in your i mean you're a trained diplomat are those so unacceptable mike in this situation uh there could only be one negotiator

[00:26:03 \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=1563s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=1563s)

there could only be one negotiator and that is the president of the united states and he's vowed never to who has all of the information at his disposal grievances yes they can be aired and they can be discussed but not in circumstances why while uh 50 americans are paying the price they did not have the right to take the hostages because hostage taken in my book and in my value system is thoroughly condemned the american people do not owe it to the iranians okay to come out and confess guilt as you say they owe it to themselves they owe it to their constitution they owe it to the concept of america as a citadel of democracy and freedom do you think that we are wrong to bring out this material for the american public at this time no i don't think

that uh you're wrong in bringing out this material at this time the reason why i was anxious to talk to you in response to your query is that i felt that this material is quite relevant but it's important that this material be evaluated by the american public by the world within the broad context of iranian-american relationships without condoning it i don't i'm not condoning these actions as you well know but within the broad context of iranian us relations as well as the positive benefits to the west and to the iranian people over a period of a quarter of a century like six presidents and six secretary states just can't be totally wrong nevertheless it was the decision of this president and this secretary of state their decision to permit the shah to enter the united states last october that triggered the capture of the embassy in the taking of the hostages a decision about which they'll have some tough questions to answer once the

00:28:00 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WA6tFp4-3QI&t=1680s>)

tough questions to answer once the hostages are free for example was the admission of the shah to the united states an instant response to the plea of a desperately sick man not according to a state department contingency document classified secret sensitive and entitled planning for the shah to come to the united states written three months before the shah's arrival it says that once the khomeini regime is firmly established quote it seems appropriate to admit the shah to the united states three months later he arrived presumably for emergency medical treatment but washington had been warned by the embassy in tehran a cable from the charges there said i doubt that the shah being ill would have much ameliorating effect on the degree of reaction here about that reaction the state department reported spelled out the danger of hostages being taken and went on when the decision is made to admit the shah we should quietly assign additional american security guards to the embassy to provide protection for key personnel until the danger period is considered over according to henry precht head of the iranian desk in the state department those guards were never provided and finally on the issue of whether the iranians had assured the americans that they would protect the embassy if the shah were to come to the united states the americans say the iranians pledged they would but yesterday iran's former foreign minister ibrahim told me that when informed officially just 24 hours before the arrival of the shah in new york yazdi says he warned the state department you are playing with fire there will be a very drastic reaction and on that subject when president carter asked secretary vance if the embassy could be protected the secretary told me friday we said we could but we didn't

---

END